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2010-07

Murphy to Head FEMA Pacific Northwest Region

Center for Homeland Defense and Security

Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California

<http://hdl.handle.net/10945/51130>



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Murphy to Head FEMA Pacific Northwest Region

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About a month into his new job as regional administrator with the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Region 10, one of Ken Murphy's first orders of business is simply meeting all the entities he will work with in that four-state area.

"Establishing a solid working relationship with my state, local tribal and federal counterparts is a key priority. The time to pass out business cards is before disaster strikes, not when lives and livelihoods are at risk," Murphy said by phone.

Murphy is a graduate of the Executive Leaders program at the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Defense and Security. He was appointed by President Barack Obama to his new position June 17.

A first priority is to lay the groundwork for working relationships by meeting the varied federal, tribal state and local groups he may need to collaborate with in times of disaster. Fostering those relationships is a lesson he has learned in his emergency management career that was reinforced while a student in the ELP program.

"The Center advocates the absolutely essential role relationships play in dealing effectively with key stakeholders," he said. "It's a lesson I've taken to heart throughout my work experience. The Center reinforced this core value."

He said an important lesson from his ELP experience was to make sure those relationships don't languish once they are established.

Prior to his FEMA appointment, Murphy had worked for the Oregon Office of Emergency Management since July 1999 and had served as the office's director since 2003. He was a member of the Oregon National Guard for 29 years.

Working in the military gave him experience in logistics and his positions in emergency management have included

everything from filling sandbags to talking to people who have lost their homes and businesses because of natural disasters.

"The last two assignments in emergency management were key because they gave me a firm grasp of the very issues I will be dealing with at the regional level," he said.

Even his very first job in a furniture store was beneficial as it taught him how to interact with people of different backgrounds.

"I learned at an early age how to deal with the public and with public expectations," Murphy said. "When you are selling a product, people have expectations, especially when they are paying for it."

In taking the helm of FEMA Region 10, Murphy will oversee a region that encompasses Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Those states have some common issues, such as forest fires, as well as unique challenges such as volcanoes in Washington or winter storms in Alaska that are more severe than in the rest of the region.

"The basic tenants of disaster preparedness, response and recovery apply-whether dealing with floods, wildfires, winter storms, earthquakes and tsunamis, volcanic activity or even terror threats," he noted.

Murphy's appointment was lauded by his colleagues in the Pacific Northwest as well as by officials in Washington, D.C.

"Regional Administrators are crucial to our ability to respond effectively to emergencies based on the needs of the communities we serve," FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate said in a written statement. "Ken Murphy is an experienced emergency manager who knows the Northwest well and is uniquely qualified to lead our efforts there."

Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski added: "Oregon is losing a great asset, but to have someone with so much experience at the regional level will be a big plus during disasters for the citizens of all four states."

Murphy is the third person with ties to CHDS to have been named a FEMA regional administrator during the past year. ELP graduate Andrew Velasquez III was named administrator for Region 5 in April and master's degree alum Anthony Russell was name administrator for Region 6 in December 2009.

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